

Meaning swift and valued runner, the *Kukini* in ancient times took news from one Hawaiian leader to another.

HICKAM *Kukini*

Serving the Air Force Hawaii Community

2003 is the 100th anniversary of Powered Flight

Nov. 22, 1988

Northrop and the Air Force rolled out the B-2 stealth bomber at Air Force plant 42 in Palmdale, Calif.

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Photo by Peter Bird

Crewmembers prepare for take off in a C-7A Caribou of the 535th Tactical Airlift Squadron during the Vietnam War. From flying Vietnam-era C-7A Caribou, the “new” squadron will soon fly the C-17 Globemaster – an aircraft with nearly four decades difference in technology but the same critical airlift mis-

Walk back in time: **535th to fly again**

By Steve Diamond
15th Airlift Wing History Office

As everyone at Hickam knows (and if you don't, you haven't been paying attention), the 15th Airlift Wing will have a new airlift mission in the next couple years – flying the Air Force's latest cargo aircraft, the C-17 Globemaster. While the wing's 65th Airlift Squadron will continue its distinguished visitor mission, the complexity of the C-17 mission will require standing up a separate, new airlift squadron.

In this case, “new” means “old” – in the sense of reactivating an old and honorable squadron, the 535th Tactical Airlift Squadron. The squadron first activated in October 1943 as the 535th Fighter Squadron. During WWII, the 535th provided replacement pilot training until disbanded in April

1944.

Briefly reactivated and deactivated again from 1949-1951, the squadron saw new life in January 1967 when it was redesignated as the 535th Troop Carrier Squadron assigned to the 483rd Troop Carrier Wing (PACAF). The wing's first order of business was supervising the transfer of all US Army C-7A “Caribou” in Southeast Asia to the USAF. From then on, 535th pilots flew “Bou's” in Vietnam, providing airlift of routine cargo, support of special forces, medical evacuation, emergency supply, airdrop of paratroops and cargo, and other combat missions. The squadron was redesignated as the 535th Tactical Airlift Squadron in August 1967.

The skills of the Caribou crews earned an impressive array of honors for actions during the Vietnam War. The 535th shared three Presidential Unit

Citations — two USAF PUCs and one Navy PUC, in part supporting US Marines during the famous Battle for Khe Sanh (1968). The ability of American airlift to keep the besieged Marines at Khe Sanh resupplied played a crucial role in preventing Khe Sanh from being a repeat of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. In addition, the 535th earned three Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with the Combat “V” Device and a Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, all for Vietnam actions. The 535th last inactivated Jan. 24, 1972.

Not only will the 535th TAS make a great leap forward to the 21st century, it will also make a great leap forward in technology. From flying Vietnam-era C-7A Caribou, the “new” squadron will soon fly the C-17 Globemaster — aircraft with almost four decades difference in technology but the same critical airlift mission.